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14 Easy Cooking Tips for Meat and Poultry Slow Cooker Recipes

by: **Anjali Dawson**

The first Christmas we spent with my in-laws in their new country home, my mother-in-law wisely gave me a slow cooker. Her thoughtful gift helped Dan and I enjoy the most convenient of all cooking methods, even with our long work days and commute.

I'll always treasure the memories of delicious aromas wafting through the front door as we stepped into the house after a long day at work and a nerve-jangling commute in heavy traffic.

Most of the slow cooker recipes I used were based on meats and poultry. Here are 14 easy tips to make your slow cooker recipes tasty and safe:

Tip # 1 - According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, bacteria in food are killed at a temperature of 165° F. Meats cooked in the slow cooker reach an internal temperature of 170° in beef and as high as 190° F in poultry. It is important to follow the recommended cooking times and to keep the cover on your slow cooker during the cooking process.

Tip # 2 - It is best not use the slow cooker for large pieces like a roast or whole chicken because the food will cook so slowly it could remain in the bacterial "danger zone" too long.

Tip # 3 - Always defrost meat or poultry before putting it into a slow cooker.

Tip # 4 - Meats generally cook faster than most vegetables in a slow cooker.

Tip # 5 - Trim all fat from meat and poultry. Fat can increase the temperature of the liquid in the slow cooker and decrease the cooking time. This will cause the food to be overcooked. Fats will also melt with long cooking times, and will add an unpleasant texture to the finished dish.

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Tip # 6 - Cooking at higher temperatures will generally give you a tougher piece of meat. for all day cooking or for less-tender cuts of meat, you may want to use the low setting.

Tip # 7 - The slow cooker recipes are best used with the tougher cuts of meats.

Tip # 8 - For the best color and texture, ground beef is best browned before using, except in meatloaf or other similar dishes.

Tip # 9 - It is not necessary to brown meat before slow cooking, but it gives more depth of flavor in the food and removes some of the fat, especially in pork, lamb and sausages. If the meat is lean, well trimmed and not highly marbled, it doesn't need to be browned.

Tip # 10 - For roasts and stews, pour liquid over meat. Use no more liquid than specified in the slow cooker recipes. More juices in meats and vegetables are retained in slow cooking than in conventional cooking.

Tip # 11 - Dark meat takes longer to cook, so if a whole cut up chicken is used, put the thighs and legs on the bottom.

Tip # 12 - The slightly coarser texture of corn-fed, organic or free-range poultry is ideal for slow cooker recipes.

Tip # 13 - Most meats require 8 hours of cooking on LOW. Use cheaper cuts of meat - not only do you save money, but these meats work better for slow cooker recipes. Cheaper cuts of meat have less fat, which makes them more suited to crockpot cooking. Moist, long cooking times result in very tender meats.

Tip # 14 - Farberware FSC600 6-quart Oval Slow Cooker oval design accommodates oversize roasts, whole chickens, hams, and/or ribs. It features a large, 6-quart capacity stoneware liner, which nests inside a chrome slow cooker base and the auto setting switches to a lower 'keep warm' setting after cooking food.

For those who are not concerned about cooking in aluminum the West Bend Versatility 6-quart Oval Slow Cooker will work well to cook meats. It has a removable aluminum insert that can be used on the stovetop to brown meats and caramelize onions before slow cooking. The bottom unit can also be used on its own as a small griddle. Its dishwasher-safe insert has a nonstick interior and an included roasting rack.